Displacement  
**-Sarah Bobko-**

***“The fish even in the fisherman's net still carries the smell of the sea.” ―*** [***Mourid Barghouti***](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3121433.Mourid_Barghouti)

This text set contains the following texts:

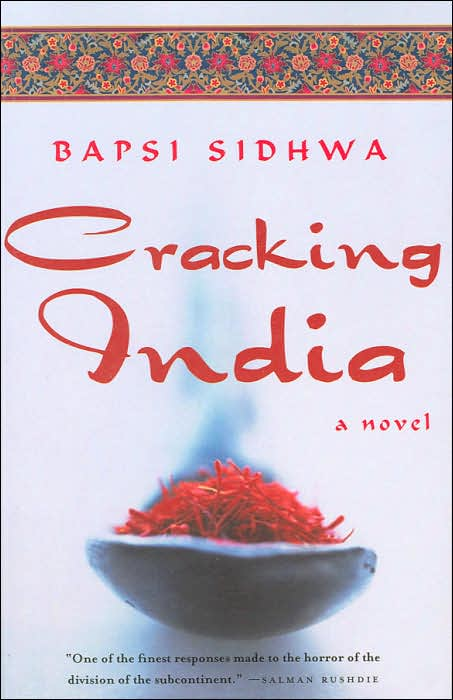
* Cracking India by Bapsi Sidhwa
* Rabbit Proof Fence by Phillip Noyce
* The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
* Borders by Thomas King
* A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah
* What do I Remember about the Evacuation? By Joy Kogawa
* Sarah’s Key by Tatiana de Rosnay
* Hotel Rwanda by Terry George
* The Refugee Hotel by Carmen Aguiree
* Nomad by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Each of these texts explores the theme of displacement. All of the characters in these stories experience physical displacement but they are displaced for different reasons. Here is a list of some of the causes of their displacement: nationalism, racism, genocide, civil war, colonialism, grave human rights violations, authoritarian governments, and political oppression. As a result of their physical displacement, many of these characters also experience social and cultural displacement; a second kind of displacement which wrecks havoc on their social and cultural well being, and on their sense of identity.

I chose the quote (above) by Bargohouti because it captures the sensibility of a lot of the characters in these stories. On the one hand, these characters have physical, social and cultural ties to their distant homelands, but they also have ties to the physical, social and cultural space that they now occupy. As a result, many of them see themselves as having conflicting identities, which they desperately seek to reconcile.

Part of what makes this theme appealing is that the characters, throughout this text set, are from a broad range of geographical areas: Asia (India & Afghanistan), Australia, North America (Canada, The United States), South America (Chile), Africa (Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Somalia), and Europe (France). The geographical breadth of this list proves that displacement is a globally shared experience.

These stories, many of which are true, have the capacity to foster great empathy for the estimated 43 million people worldwide who are currently displaced.

**1.Cracking India by Bapsi Sidhwa**

**Summary:**  
*Cracking India* is a semi-autographical story set in Lahore, India in the 1940s. The story is told through the eyes of a young girl named Lenny. When we first meet Lenny, Lahore is portrayed as idyllic place where all races, ethnicities and religious sects (such as Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus) are at peace with one another. By the time Lenny reaches adolescence, however, the people of Lahore have become deeply divided on a variety of issues, and the peaceful stability in Lahore is threatened. They stand divided on issues such as: India’s independence from Britain and the partitioning of India into India and Pakistan. It is at this point in the novel where we see racial/ethnic and religious lines drawn, tensions materialize and violence erupts. The partition of India was designed to divide India into two separate states - one with a Muslim majority (Pakistan) and the other with a Hindu majority (India), but as the story shows, you can’t just break a country in half; Lenny expresses this same sentiment early on in the book*: “Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother’s then?*

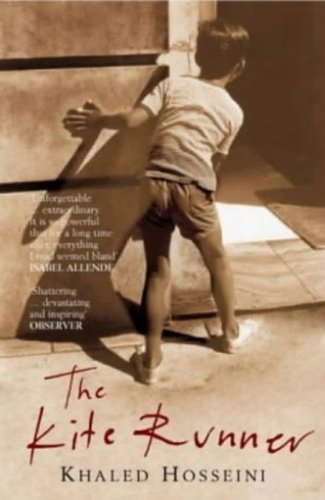
**Rationale:**   
This is very much a story about physical displacement, and it is so cleverly told through the eyes of a child who can only grasp the immediate impact that the partition of India will have on her life (i.e. she won’t be able to get to her grandmother’s house). Lenny’s memory of partition, however, is also part of a larger collective memory of a time when seven million Muslims and five million Hindus were uprooted from their homes and forced to relocate to unfamiliar areas. Through Lenny, the author sheds light on how partition damaged the relationships between family members and friends. She also sheds light on the deep-seated racism that transpired from extreme nationalism on both sides. As Lenny shows us, the partition of India created an atmosphere of great distrust and hostility, and this novel gives students the opportunity to reflect on how nationalism and colonialism displaced people physically, culturally and socially.

**2. Rabbit Proof-Fence by Phillip Noyce**

**Summary:**This is a true story and it is set in the 1930s in a remote indigenous community in Jigalong, Australia. The protagonists of the story are two sisters: 14 year old Molly Craig, 8 year old Daisy Kadibil; their mother and grandmother; and their 10 year old cousin Gracie Fields. Early on in the story, we learn that Auber Ocftavius Neville – the chief Protector of Aborigines – has been instructed to locate any children who are half-castes (who have one white and one aboriginal parent), take them away from their families, and put them into a school (near Moore River) that will civilize them and prepare them for work as servants and laborers. Molly, Daisy and Gracie are just three of many girls forcibly taken from their home and brought to Moore River. Once they are, however, the girls devise a daring plan to escape. Moodoo, a professional tracker who works for the chief protector, is chosen to go after the girls and bring them back to the Moore River Settlement. Daisy and Molly manage to avoid Moodoo and make it back home to their families, thanks to a guiding fence that they know runs all the way back to Jigalong, but Gracie isn’t as lucky.

**Rationale:**This story is about physical, social and culture displacement. During 1931, the Australian government took aboriginal children and half-caste children away from their families and brought them to settlements like Moore River to be assimilated. Students will discover that the children who were brought to Moore River endured extreme social and cultural displacement: they were not allowed to speak in their native tongue; they were forced to abandon their aboriginal heritage and were told to “act” white. When they do not do as they were told, they were put into solitary confinement for 14 days. This story serves as a testament to the emotional and physical abuse that the three girls (and children like them) had to endure because of the Australian government’s eugenics policy toward half-castes. Today, these children are referred to as the “stolen generation”, and the government’s policy is judged harshly by current generations.

**3.The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini**

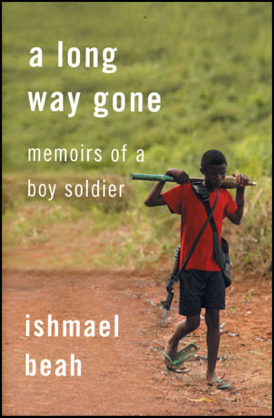
**Summary:** This fictional story is set in Kabul, Afghanistan in the late 1970s-1981. During that time period, three political/historical events took place: the Soviet’s invaded Afghanistan, the Afghan people sought refuge in other countries, and the Taliban regime commanded a strong will over the people of Afghanistan. All three of these events make up the backdrop of this story. The protagonist of the story is Amir who is a privileged Pashtun. The other main character is Hassan, an oppressed Hazara. The book begins with a focus on the boys’ strong friendship. Their friendship is severed however when Amir watches Hassan get raped, and never intervenes. After witnessing the brutal act, Amir becomes consumed with guilt. While Amir is trying to overcome his feelings of guilt, the Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, and Amir and his family escape to Pakistan, and then they seek political asylum in Fremont, California. In California, Amir and his father find it hard to adjust to American life. One day, Amir gets a phone call from a family friend living in Afghanistan who says that Hassan is dead but Hassan’s son Sohrab is alive and needs his help. Amir realizes that this is his opportunity to rid himself of his guilt and “be good again”.

**Rationale:**This book deals with physical displacement, as Amir and his family are forced to seek political asylum in the United States. Fortunately, the United States, and many other countries around the world today grant asylum to those who fear persecution because of their race, ethnicity, and nationality or because of their cultural, religious or political beliefs. This book also sheds light on what it is like to feel culturally and socially out of place. When Amir returns to Kabul, he states: “I barely knew Kabul anymore, the city where I had lived my entire life” (214). Likewise, Amir’s father has trouble adjusting to life in America, especially when the grocery store clerk asks to see his license: “almost two years we’ve bought [your] damn fruits and put money in [your] pocket and [you] want to see my license” (134). As well, Amir explains that Sohrab has trouble not only adjusting to life in America, but also life after unrelenting trauma: “Sohrab’s silence wasn’t the self-imposed silence of those with convictions, of protestors who seek to speak their cause by to speaking at all; it was the silence of one who has taken cover in a dark place” (381). Students can do character analyses of Amir, Amir’s father and Sohrab, and compare their feelings of cultural and social displacement.

1. **Borders by Thomas King**

**Summary:**This fictional short story is set in Blackfoot, Alberta in an unspecified time. The protagonists of the story are: a mother, her 12 year old boy, and her 17 year old daughter named Laetitia. Early on in the book, Laetitia tells her mom that she desperately wants to move to Salt Lake City because she read a pamphlet about Salt Lake City that said that it “was one of the best places in the entire world” to live. Reluctantly, her mother agrees to let her daughter move to the United States. Once she’s gone, her family starts to miss her, so that they decide to make a trip across the border to visit her. Their trip goes smoothly until the guard at the Canadian-American border asks for the mother’s citizenship, and she says “Blackfoot” instead of Canadian. After refusing to admit to being Canadian, she and her son are forced to camp out at the Duty Free. The next morning, they wake up to television vans. Once the media starts to report on the situation, the border patrols decide to let the mother and her son cross the border to avoid public scrutiny.

**Rationale:**  
This is a story about physical, cultural and social displacement. The Blackfoot Confederacy were known inhabitants of southern Alberta and northern Montana as early as the 1700s. But in 1855, they reluctantly signed a treaty with the American government, and in 1877 they grudgingly signed a treaty with the Canadian government, and agreed to settle on reserves in both countries. This story is a testament to those moments in history when geographical lines were redrawn by European settlers, and the Blackfoot were displaced and forced to settle in small settlements. Throughout the story, the boy’s mother refuses to identify as Canadian because she only sees herself as a Blackfoot. Like many Blackfoot, the boy’s mother refuses to accept imposed boundaries and citizenship. Today, the Blackfoot have their own constitution which outlines: territory and jurisdiction, citizenship and rights/responsibilities, government and law and judiciary procedures. This story can be used to show students that in Canada, we have nations inside a nation with very distinct culturally identities.

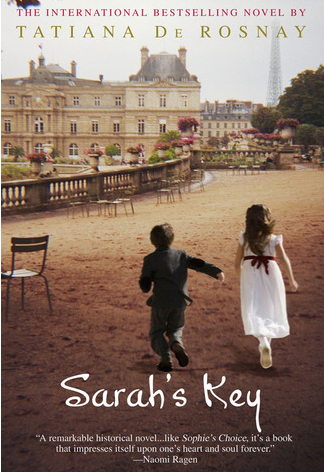
1. **A long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah**

**Summary:**    
This story is a memoir that is set in Sierra Leone in 1993. The protagonist, Ishmael Beah, was 12 years old when civil war broke out in his home: Sierra Leone. The civil war was ignited by the rebel group known as the R.U.F. (Revolutionary United Front). Among other things, the R.U.F. kidnapped children like Beah and turned them into children soldiers. In this story, Beah, now 26, recounts the day he fled from the rebels and the day he was snatched up by the rebel army. He informs us of fact that if he didn’t kill, he would be killed, and he explains what it was like to be given an AK-47 and drugs such as: amphetamines, marijuana and a toxic mix of cocaine and gunpowder know as brown sugar. Eventually, Beah gets released by the army and is brought to one of UNICEF’s rehabilitation centers. But at the center, he struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder after experiencing so much violence and trauma. At the end of the memoir, we learn that Laura Simms, a UNICEF worker, adopts him and brings him to New York City. Eventually, Beah goes on to earn a degree in Political Science, and lead a fairly “normal” American life.

**Rationale:**  
This book is about physical displacement since Beah was internally displaced when rebel forces attacked his village in 1993. In this way, Beah’s memoir puts a face to one of the estimated 300,000 children – boys and girls – worldwide who have been torn away from their families and homes and put into combat. But this story also gives student’s some insight into the kind of psychological damage that child soldiers’ experience. Many child soldiers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and struggle to reintegrate into society after a life of violence. UNCIEF and organizations like it however have helped people like Beah by offering them things such as psychosocial counselling. In the book, the most powerful message for Beah is something his foster mom conveys: “It’s not your fault”. Students can reflect on how this saying helps Beah regain his humanity, and his sense of identity.

**6. What do I remember of the Evacuation? By Joy Kogawa**   
 **Summary:**   
This poem is written by a Canadian-Japanese poet who was born in Vancouver, British Columbia on June 6th, 1935. During WWII, her and her family were sent to an internment camp, along with many other Canadians of Japanese descent. This poem is a series of Joy’s broken memories about that moment in her life her when the federal government of Canada was given the power to intern all people of Japanese origin, and her and her family were deported miles away from their home. It is also a comment on how acts of racism damage a child’s social well-being.

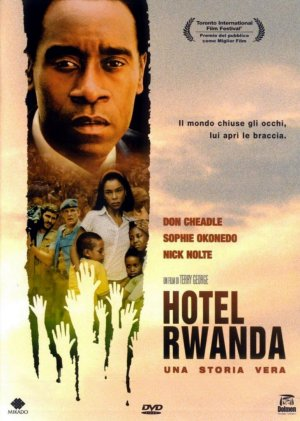
**Rationale:**   
This is a poem about physical displacement. In the beginning of the poem, Joy comments on how her and her family had to leave all their possessions behind and board a train heading toward an unknown destination. Once they arrived at their unknown location, she explains, they were “herded into Hastings Park like cattle” and were placed in stables and barnyards made for animals. This poem is a testament to a time in Canadian history when approximately 22,000 Japanese-Canadians were taken from their homes and scattered all throughout British Columbia. It is also a comment on how racism affects the way a person views him or herself. At the end of the poem, Joy gets picked on by other children who discriminate against her because of her heritage. When she gets taunted for being a Japanese-Canadian, she confesses privately that she wishes she was “white”. This poem sharply illustrates Joy’s feelings of anger and self-judgment, and her increasing sense of insecurity about her identity. Even though her parents tell her not to be “bitter”, her memory of her time in a Japanese internment camp causes her to become consumed with feelings of resentment. Students can draw comparisons between Joy’s story and the story of the three aboriginal girls from Rabbit Proof Fence, as they are all displaced because of their race.

**7. Sarah’s Key by Tatiana de Rosnay**

**Summary:**This fictional story is set in Paris, France and alternates between 1942 (the past) and 2009 (the present). The main protagonist is Julia, an American journalist, who wants to write an article about the Vel d’Hiv Roundup which occurred on July 16th 1942; the Roundup was when 12,000 Jewish adults and children were forcibly removed from their homes in Paris, France and sent to Nazi death camps. In this story, Julia discovers that she lives in the home that once belonged to a little Jewish girl named Sarah who was taken in the roundup. Determined to find out the fate of the little girl, Julia starts to do some investigative work. After doing some research, Julia learns that Sarah was the only one of her family members who managed to escape the death camp. Julia also discovers that eventually Sarah moved to the United States, married and had a son, but because she was haunted by a deep dark secret, she ended up committing suicide.

**Rationale:**  
This story is about physical and social displacement. On July 16th 1942, 12,000 Jewish people, (including over 4,000 children) like Sarah and her family were forcibly taken from their homes. 7,000 of them, including Sarah and her parents, were put into an indoor sports stadium before being shipped off to death camps in Eastern Europe. Sarah’s brother is not taken by the Persian police, however, because Sarah locks him in a room in their house and promises to return to him. Even though Sarah manages to escape her own death, a part of her dies when she finds her dead brother in her old house. Like Beah, Sarah struggles to re-invent herself and re-integrate into society after so many traumatic events: the roundup, the death of her brother and the guilt that goes along with this death, and the disappearance of her parents. Even though her life after the roundup appears “normal”, she is unable to heal her emotional wounds. Without collapsing the two experiences into one, students can make strong comparisons between Beah and Sarah’s attempt to re-integrate into their new society.

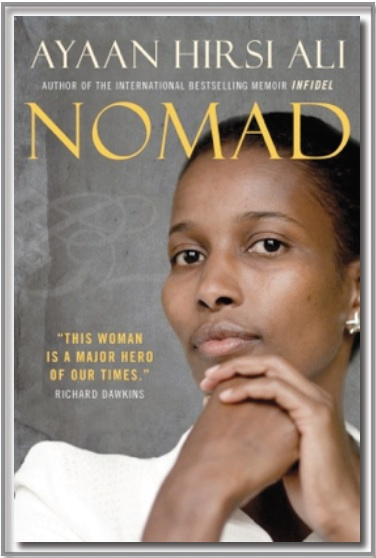
**8. Hotel Rwanda by Terry George**

**Summary:**  
This movie is set in 1994 in Kigali Rwanda, and it is based on a true story. When tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi lead to genocide in Rwanda, Paul Rusesabagina, the manager of a hotel called: Hotel des Mille Collines decides to house as many Hutu (the more oppressed group) as he can to protect them from ethnic violence. In the movie and in real life, he manages to save the lives of 1,268 Hutu. Once he’s given the Hutu some refuge, he focuses his efforts on getting the world’s attention. First, he makes contact with a journalist. But the journalist reluctantly tells him: "If people see this footage, they'll say, 'Oh my God, that's terrible,' and they'll go on eating their dinners”. So Rusesabagina decides to get in touch with Colonel Oliver, a United Nations solider. But Oliver tells him that he has been given strict orders not to get involved with the genocide. Eventually Ruseabagina, his family and the refugees in the hotel are able to leave the hotel in a UN convoy. But at this point, many lives have been lost because of the world’s indifference.

**Rationale:**This story is about the emotional and physical journey of internally displaced people. According to the Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey, approximately “2 million people were displaced” in the wake of the genocide of 1994 (63). After the genocide had subsided, the Hutu militia set up supervised refugee camps for the Hutu population, but eventually the Hutu people displaced into new villages and countries to try and return to their normal lives (63). By 2001, however, approximately 70 percent of the Rwandan population was living below the poverty line and approximately 192,000 families were in inadequate shelters (63). Together with these statistics, this film shows how the displacement of the Hutu was a humanitarian crisis of gigantic proportions. After watching the film, students can discuss some of the logistical challenges of commanding the will of the international community, and responding to genocide and mass population displacements.

**9. The Refugee Hotel by Carmen Aguirre**

**Summary:**This fictional play was written and directed by a Chilean-Canadian author and playwright named Carmen Aguirre and it is set in Vancouver, British Colombia in the 1970s. Her play is a comment on what it was like to leave Chile, which was a dictatorship during the 1970s, and start a new life in Canada. The main characters are: Flaca, Isabel, Christina, Manuelita, Fat Jorge, and Joselito. When they reunite in Canada, each of them explains their story to one another: Isabel does not initially speak about her experiences; Manuel, has just escaped a concentration camp and has not yet recovered worked through his physical and psychological trauma; Christina feels guilty about her decisions to come to Canada in part because she has not yet found her parents; Manuelita and Joselito are fortunate enough to have escaped imprisonment and have been reunited with their parents, but they are still haunted by their horrific experiences in Chile.   
  
**Rationale:**This play is about physical, social and cultural displacement. By 1974, Canada had become a place of refuge for Chileans who were facing extreme oppression under the Chilean dictatorship. During the 1970s, Canada’s open immigration policy made it possible for immigrants, like the ones in this play, to become Canadian citizens. Many Canadians banded together to assist the exiled newcomers settle in Canada but not every Canadian was so receptive to them. In-fact, some worried that the newcomers would alter the social, political and economic life of the country. So the reactions to the newcomers were very polarized. But together, the characters in the play are able to build a sense of community through their shared experiences. The characters are also able to build a sense of community with many non-Chileans who have been marginalized in Canada. Together, the characters help each other carve out a place for themselves in Canada. Without collapsing the two experiences into one, students can make strong comparisons between the characters in Borders and the characters in this play, as they are all trying to be true to their native identities.

**10. Nomad by Ayaan Hirsi Ali  
Summary:**This memoir is written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a woman born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1969. At the beginning of her memoir, she states: “All my life I have been a nomad. I have wandered, rootless. Every place I have settled in, I have been forced to flee; every certainty I have been taught, I have cast aside...every change of country threw me unprepared into whole new languages and sharply different habits of mind. Each time, I made a child’s forlorn, often vain attempt to adapt” (xi). Throughout the course of her early life, Ayaan and her family move from Somalia, to Saudi Arabia, to Ethiopia and finally to Kenya. Then, at age of 21, Ayaan becomes a zealous Muslim, and decides to return to Somalia, which is in the middle of a brutal civil war. During this war, half of the population in Somalia was displaced. A year later, at the age of 22, her father tells her that he has arranged for her to marry a total stranger in Toronto. On her journey to Canada, she goes against her father’s wishes and escapes to Holland. Then, she decides to move to the United States and in 2001, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, she denounces Islam. Because of her denunciation, her family deems her a traitor, and this memoir is in many ways an open dialogue between her and family members.

**Rationale:**This memoir is about physical displacement, as Ayaan is forced to leave Somalia because her father wants to escape political persecution. When Ayanan settles back in Somalia though, her homeland is in chaos; Mohammed Siad Barre and Ali Mahdi Mohamed are fighting to be the next dictator of the country. A year after being back in Somalia, Ayaan witnesses an estimated 350,000 Somalis die as a result of the political turmoil. When she finally decides to immigrate to the United States, September 11th happens and Ayaan finds herself revaluating her faith. As remarkable as her story is, her memoir does voice some anti-Islamic views, and for that reason it should be used in the classroom with caution. Its strength lies in the fact that it captures the human struggle to embrace a new way of life while holding on to your own cultural beliefs and habits of mind. Ayann also very poignantly emphasizes the difficulties that immigrants, particularly Muslims, have in adjusting to life in Western societies. If used, I think students should be taught to read the memoir with the critical mindfulness of columnist Nicholas D. Kristof who argues that, “this memoir, while engaging and insightful in many places, exemplifies precisely the kind of rhetoric that is overheated”.